

OCI #0623/74 10/31/74

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TITO

As his health gradually declines, Tito seems increasingly impelled to get the Yugoslav house into the best possible shape before he leaves the scene. He well knows that, by any standard of leadership, he towers over those who will succeed him, and he is driven by determination both to ensure the survival and independence of Yugoslavia and to show lesser men how it is done.

Tito's preoccupation with arranging his own succession has been particularly evident during the past three years. His actions on several fronts have even suggested his haste to solve as many problems as possible.

On the domestic scene, he has tried to slow, if not stop, the pendular swings of popular sentiment between East and West that often characterize Yugoslav political dynamics. He has repeatedly made it clear that all forms of extremism will be quashed, and by force if necessary. His concerns are to contain and undercut the kind of pro-Western liberalism that was evident in the nationalist outbreaks in Croatia in 1971, and to prevent witch-hunting and over-reaction by conservatives at the other end of the spectrum.

At the same time, he has moved to strengthen federalism, both by beefing up the central government and by attempting to

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re-establish the party's role as the leading force in society. On the state side, he has arranged his succession by creating a collective presidency in which the office of President will rotate annually among the nine vice-presidents--one from each national area. In the party, however, he has steered clear of naming an heir apparent.

He has also seen to the survival of Titoism in all its aspects by having the Yugoslav political and economic system enshrined in the new constitution adopted last May.

In foreign affairs, Tito's overriding concern has been to compose relations with the Soviet Union in order to leave his successors the minimum number of problems with the Kremlin. Rapprochement with Brezhnev, carefully built since 1971 and helped along by Soviet economic credits, got new impetus following the coincidence of Yugoslav and Soviet interests in the Middle East war last October.

The trust relationship that resulted was shattered by Belgrade's discovery that Moscow was not only supporting the Cominformist plotters but was probably also involved in other anti-Tito operations in the country. Moscow's meddling has not, however, altered Tito's objective of doing whatever is possible to head off Soviet interference after he is gone. He has carefully contained his fury and kept state-to-state relations on an even keel--and thus taught his volatile cohorts

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a vital lesson in measured response. He has nevertheless made it clear to his people that the Soviets have again been caught red-handed, and has placed renewed emphasis both on internal security and national defense.

Throughout the period of rapprochement, he was aware that the swing toward the East would cause some trouble with the West. He has acted, however, out of an evident conviction that the West is always ready to support him when and if relations with Moscow go sour. He is on record as saying that name-calling in propaganda media really does not harm good relations.

In the days ahead, Tito will probably launch new efforts to strengthen the non-aligned movement as he seeks to steer a middle course between the superpowers. He has always sought to place Yugoslavia--and himself--at the head of a viable third force in world affairs, and thus to give Yugoslavia a measure of influence far out of proportion to the power it actually disposes.

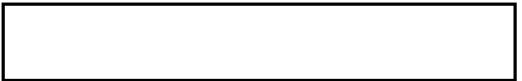
Tito knows that his time is running short and that he must move with all possible speed to accomplish the goals he has set himself. His health seems to have become more fragile over the past year, and he is now more willing than before to heed the advice of his doctors and to husband his energy.

There is no evidence that his illnesses have affected his

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mental capacities. He generally remains his old, ebullient, forceful self, keenly aware of history and of his role in it.



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